

Sirhan's Arab Community

By George Lardner
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LOS ANGELES, June 16—Adnan Deen is keeping his gun loaded.

Manager of an Export-Import store on Hollywood Boulevard, he doesn't want to follow the Jordanian merchant shot in Chicago last week in apparent reprisal for the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

The Arabic community here has been unnerved from the moment it was disclosed that the slight, swarthy suspect arrested for the killing was Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, a 24-year-old Jordanian immigrant.

There have been only a few minor incidents. At Deen's shop, one crank started a fire in the awning and another set a lizard loose in the store.

But the apprehension remains.

Anonymity is being sought by Los Angeles area's 25,000 Arab-Americans these days. "The community's gone into hiding," says Henry Awad, president of the Lebanese-Syrian-American Society and editor of a monthly English-language newspaper here for Arab-Americans.

Sirhan's family—his mother and four brothers—have been

taken into hiding, under police protection. Moved from their small frame house shortly after the shooting, they are living in a tightly guarded private home.

The family has also felt the sting of Sirhan's arrest in other ways.

Sirhan's 29-year-old brother, Adel, had been playing an Arab musical instrument on weekends at a belly dance club, Shaker's Oasis, before the shooting. The management doesn't want to see him again. "He might get shot," reasons Club Manager Harry Shaker.

Another brother, Saidallah, 36, was to have been sworn in as a U. S. citizen the day after Kennedy's death. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service canceled the appointment. District Director George Rosenberg claimed that reports of "motor vehicle violations" conflicted with the requirement of "good moral character" for naturalized citizens.

The Arab-American community here is closely knit. Yet few will admit to knowing Sirhan. Those who do usually claim to have met him only once or twice, just in passing.

Yet at the same time there is widespread rationalization, even sympathy, for the murder for which Sirhan stands indicted. His "anti-Zionism" is widely shared. Time and again, it is argued that the real villain is "international Zionism" and, secondarily, Kennedy's support of jet fight-

ers for Israel.

Sirhan does not appear to have been a member of any of the Arabic organizations in the city. In any event, not a few of the Arab-American organizations show the same sort of persecution complex so widely attributed to Sirhan. It also makes them candidates for the overtures of the far American right and white racists.

The groups include the United American Arab Congress, the American-Arab Citizens Council, the Americans (of Lebanese Syrian Ancestry) for American, and the Arabic Society of Americanists.

Formed after the lightning

Fears Retaliation

Israeli victory last year in the June war, the United American Arab Congress has its \$50-a-month headquarters in what the community calls "the White House" on Hollywood Boulevard.

Its general counsel, George E. Shibley, said it was formed to help raise funds for Arab refugees and to combat "support of Zionism by the American press."

Israel, in turn, is likened by the UAAC to "Nazi Germany" and "Fascist Japan." "All three claimed to be superman or God's chosen people," one UAAC broadside has proclaimed. "All three terrorized civilian populations and



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Lloyd Hager, manager, shows targets at the San Gabriel Valley Gun Club, where suspect Sirhan is said in sworn testimony to have been seen practicing with gun hours before the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

claimed the lands they overran 'by right of conquest.'"

According to one report, Sirhan and several of his brothers attended meetings of the so-called "American Arabs" which was allegedly a youth auxiliary of the UAAC.

Officials of the Congress, however, say they had no youth organization and never heard of any group called the

"American Arabs." Neither have other community leaders.

UAAC headquarters, in any event, are deserted these days. An official of the Lebanese-Syrian-American Society, which manages the building, said it was six months behind in its rent.

The American-Arab Council was also apparently formed last year to promote "better

understanding of Middle Eastern problems." It had a newsletter called "The Prophet" that devoted one issue to pictures of burned Arab children over a caption, "Auschwitz—1967 style." Council Chairman Phil Zogaib, however, says the organization is now defunct.

Zogaib has also served as chairman of the Americans (of Lebanese-Syrian Ancestry) for America, an organization headed by Dr. T. J. Toma, dentist who is also president of the Arabic Society of Americanists.

How successful the various groups have been in resisting racist and right-wing overtures is open to question. One UAAC newsletter last summer warned against "white racist groups . . . coming out in support of the Arabs" and cautioned its members against aligning themselves with "hate mongers."

Dr. Toma, has also been a prominent spokesman for John Birch Society causes. He once got into a hassle with postal officials over stamping his mail with the slogan "Save America—impeach J.F.K.—General Walker, truth and freedom, yes—one world, Godless UN govt. & Tyranny No."

How much, if any, of this climate filtered down to Sirhan, he may have been active in the organization of Arab students while attending Pasadena City College, but college officials maintain there is no OAS chapter there.

Officials of the other organizations say they never noticed plain, a joiner. "I never heard of him until this incident," said Dr. Toma, "I guess he's a loner, really."